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ABSTRACT

The guide is intended to help teachers teach mentally handicapped children who have been mainstreamed into preschool, nursery school, or first grade public school classes. Part 1 answers frequently asked questions regarding the definition of mental retardation, realistic expectations, emotional needs, discipline, and teaching approaches. Part 2 deals with program planning, design, and evaluation. Student evaluation topics include sensory awareness, motor coordination, use of materials, sustained play, language, accumulative knowledge, frustration tolerance, initiative, interpersonal relationships, imagination, and creativity. Environmental evaluation topics (on the three levels of safety and comfort, emotional support, and the program) include elements of space-time identity, articulation, transistion, scale, community vs. isolation, privacy, territoriality, and character. Suggestions are made for evaluating materials and for beginning procedures. Part 3 focuses on implementing the program and includes descriptions of first steps toward competency (developing a self image and personal and social skills); language and communication skills (developing sensory discrimination); creative activities (music, art, and creative movement); motor development (toys and equipment, muscle development); and utilization of community helpers as resources. (BD)

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# A GUIDE TO

# TEACHING

## FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

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Harriet Klebanoff

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Mental Health
190 Portland Street, Boston, Mass. 02114

Dear Colleagues:

For almost twenty years, Massachusetts has had a law providing Community Clinical Nursery Schools for young retarded children. The program is conducted by the Department of Mental Health. Over the years, thousands of children have been helped in their development and prepared for special educational services in the schools. Some of these children have had severe emotional problems, some physical limitations and, increasingly, we are serving those with multiple impairments.

Our Nursery Schools have been conducted in schools, churches, hospitals, other public buildings, and occasionally in a university. They have been urban, suburban, and semi-rural areas. In the beginning particularly, our teachers came from a variety of backgrounds. Pre-school education had not reached the level stimulated by Head Start, and there were few training programs for early childhood educators -- almost none for teachers of retarded children. In general, we chose trained and experienced early childhood educators -- even with no special education training or experience -- because we felt, and continue to feel, that understanding of and experience with young children is the major variable.

We developed our own training and supervisory system under the superb leadership of Mrs. Dorothy G. Tucker. Over the years, she attracted many gifted persons both to our regular staff and as special consultants.

We have never been too proud to learn from whoever would teach us -- although our children have been our chief source of knowledge.

Many new insights were developed by our staff, written down, shared with and tried by others, refined and modified. We have had such good response from outside colleagues with whom we have shared the material that we decided to print much of it for wider sharing. In the current series are the following manuals:

A GUIDE TO CREATIVE ARTS FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

A GUIDE TO SWIMMING INSTRUCTION FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

A GUIDE TO CREATIVE MOVEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

A GUIDE TO IMAGE EDUCATION: SOME EXPERIENCES IN CLASSROOMS FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

A GUIDE TO TEACHING DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

We hope you will find these GUIDES useful and practical. We hope they will widen the horizons of possibility for young children with developmental disabilities. The surface has only been scratched -- we all have so much more to learn. If, in reading these GUIDES, you discover that you have better solutions to some problems than we have, please send them along -- our kids don't care where good ideas originate.

Cordially,

Lewis B. Klebanoff

Lewis B. Klebanoff, Ph.D., S.M. Hyg.
Assistant Commissioner for Retardation

# prologue

"Mental retardation" is more than a term describing a condition of intellectual functioning. It has become a term which evokes certain expectations and behaviors in many people. It has become a label which prescribes a person's potential for development -- emotionally, intellectually, and socially. As such, these expectations often work against the retarded person, obscuring some very real personalities and needs. And, like most labels, those personalities and needs that make an individual special are neglected by many attempting to comprehend the group.

Mentally retarded people are, first of all, people. They share the same needs for stimulation and development, for understanding and acceptance, for shelter, sleep, joy and pleasure as everyone else. The difference lies in the fact that, for the retarded person, learning comes more slowly. Thus, special kinds of education, personal and social attention, and skills training are needed.

For a long time, society has chosen to separate the retarded from the normal people, both institutionally and programmatically, thus negating some important needs in both groups. Recently the benefits of integration have been felt in many communities. A respect for individual differences, for a shared humanity, and for the special needs of all persons are being recognized -- and the society as a whole can only stand to benefit.

Special education programs in many schools have opened new opportunities for the retarded person to lead a more normal life. Some retarded persons have begun to catch up with their peers in integrated classrooms across the state. This GUIDE was prepared for those teachers who will be working with mentally retarded children in preschools and nursery schools, or in the first grades of public elementary schools where integration will take effect.

# THE CHALLENGE TO THE TEACHER — PART

# PREPARING THE SCHOOL PROGRAM — PART

# CARRYING OUT THE PROGRAM — PART

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# PART

# 1 THE CHALLENGE TO THE TEACHER

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5 What special emotional needs might these children have?
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## FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

Teachers who will be working with mentally retarded children in their classrooms for the first time may naturally feel some anxiety about the challenge this presents. They may ask: What should I know about the background of these children? What sorts of special needs will they have in the classroom? How will they affect the other children -- and me? These are understandable and realistic questions to ask, and deserve honest answers.

### * What is mental retardation?

This is not a simple question to answer. The problem of mental retardation is created, to a large extent, by the nature of our society and the kinds of decisions we make about how our human and material resources will be allocated. Let's begin by looking at how a person becomes defined as "mentally retarded."

Generally speaking, mentally retarded people are those of us whose measured intelligence falls significantly below the average, and whose ability to function in society is to some degree reduced. The formal definition from the American Association on Mental Deficiency reads as follows: "significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior, and manifested during the developmental period."

Two parts of this definition need to be explained more clearly. The first refers to the level of "intellectual functioning." According to the definition, an individual is classified as mentally retarded based on the level of functioning at that point in time when intelligence was measured. That is, the definition measures only the person's condition at a given time, and does not necessarily indicate a subnormal capacity for change. With special treatment -- involving special education, remedial therapy, and improved medical care -- the mentally retarded

person may improve in school, attain higher I.Q. test scores, and adjust to other situations and people in a positive way. Just as all people grow and develop over time, so can those classified as mentally retarded also modify their condition in response to special treatment.

The second part of the definition involves "adaptive behavior." This refers to a person's ability to attain the necessary skills relevant to his or her stage in development. For example, an infant's adaptive behavior is measured by the ability to grasp objects, while an older child would be measured by the ability to comprehend mathematical concepts. We live in a society where intellectual ability is highly valued, and the person who functions with difficulty at conceptual levels is likely to be at a disadvantage. Mentally retarded individuals often operate quite well on a concrete and immediate level (speaking, working with their hands, recognizing objects), but experience difficulty with abstract levels of thought (reading, using concepts, etc.). This makes it more difficult for them to function in our society. In some ways, the condition of mental retardation is created by the value which our society places upon intellectual achievement, and the stigma faced by an individual whose major mode of functioning lies in other areas.

* <u>What are realistic expectations for these children?</u>

Until recently, the attitude of most people toward mental retardation was quite negative. The underlying and damaging prejudice about retarded people was that they could not change -- that their condition was permanent. Because retarded people were believed to be incapable of growing or learning, society could justify its neglect of them.

We now know that the mind, like a muscle, needs stimulation and activity in order to grow. If it is not exercised, particularly during the early years of a person's life,

the mind does not develop -- in the same way that a muscle atrophies if it is not used.

If the parents, teachers, and professionals working with retarded children believe it is their responsibility to actively encourage maximum development, then the possibilities are extended immeasurably.

* What special emotional needs might these children have?

The personality of a retarded child develops along the same lines as that of other children: every child's concept of self is powerfully influenced by the perceptions and attitudes of other persons. Because in our culture retardation is regarded negatively, the retarded person incorporates these negative attitudes and develops a feeling of failure.

The implications of this for the teacher's work are great. Starting early with small successes, the teacher can help the child develop a feeling of competence and progress to greater gains. Teachers can break the cycle in which failure reinforces negative self-image by creating a learning environment in which realistic expectations can lead to realistic successes.

Because many retarded children may be less articulate and unable to express their concerns or respond to a teacher's actions, teachers frequently assume that they are less aware than they actually are, and may speak and act as though the children were not present. It is very important that teachers realize that these children, like all children, are aware of what adults are saying and feeling about them, and do incorporate hostile or accepting attitudes as judgments of self-worth.

* How can I carry out discipline?

Discipline should be regarded as a maturing and a learning process, not as a harsh and punitive necessity. This does not mean that all behavior must be tolerated: rather, it is by consistent, firm, and reasonable external controls that a child learns self-control. Children want and need reasonable controls. It is most anxiety-producing for a child to feel that there are no boundaries to define acceptable behavior. Understood limits offer the child an opportunity to exercise a degree of freedom and to feel the satisfaction of security and rewards for mature behavior.

Discipline in the preschool classroom is often complicated by several factors. Many children may not have had consistent controls at home. If a teacher or parent accepts the child as an individual with certain rights, he or she must also accept the child as an individual with responsibilities and obligations -- no matter how few or how small. The child must learn that for his or her own happiness and safety, and for that of others, there are certain modes of behavior which are acceptable and desirable, and others which are not. A child's adjustment to a world which he or she does not quite understand will largely depend on social behavior.

There are a number of ways the teacher can constructively bring discipline into the classroom. A few parameters follow:

- Self-expression is an important part of the educational program. The atmosphere of the preschool should recognize the child's need for physical movement and emotional expression, and channel these into acceptable and satisfying experiences.

- The teacher must balance the needs of the group with those of the individual. No child should be allowed to disrupt a group, injure another child, or tease another child beyond that child's limit.

- No child should be asked to make a decision of which he or she is not capable.
- No child should be given permission to make a decision unless the teacher plans to abide by it.
- Children should know the limits or rules of the classroom -- and the reasons for them, when it is within their understanding.
- Consistency is a very important aspect of discipline. An action cannot be accepted one day but forbidden the next unless the child understands the reasons for this shift.
- The teacher should try to understand why a child behaves in certain ways: perhaps by understanding the intentions or motives, she can deal with conflicts more easily.
- No child should be shamed or made to feel guilty. Expressions such as "you're a bad boy" will not foster the change in behavior or attitudes which is the aim.
- The teacher should be honest with the child, expressing disapproval if she doesn't like what is being done, and offering alternatives to the behavior.
- The teacher's voice should remain non-threatening, though firm. An excessively emotional reaction from the teacher will do little to help an emotionally upset child.
- Because groups tend to discipline themselves, the teacher must be prepared to observe the dynamics of these interactions, and help the children work it through on acceptable levels.
- Following a child's lead is not the same as catering to whims. Developing attitudes of mutual respect is the goal.
- If a child becomes overstimulated by a group, a change to parallel play or to a smaller, more compatible group may help.

- Teachers must be aware of the diversity in the children's cultural backgrounds, and build upon their positive aspects.
- Parent-teacher conferences are important so that all adults concerned can understand the child better.
- Each teacher and each child is an individual. A teacher conducts her class within the framework which best suits her own personality.

* What teaching approach has been found most successful?

Happily, the approach most successful with children who are mentally retarded is the very one which is most successful with all children. The ways in which mentally retarded children may differ from other children are actually far outweighed by the ways in which they are similar.

All children, in order to develop, need affection, stability, and support from adults, as well as experiences among their peers. And all children go through the same stages in developmental growth, but at varying rates. For example, one child may learn language skills early, yet need patient instruction in self-care. Another may have mastered many practical independence skills, yet require continuing encouragement in the creative arts. An objective look at the distinctly different ways in which children adapt to social change, learn new skills, and grasp new concepts, will offer immediate proof that EVERY CHILD IS, IN FACT, A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD.

The key to encouraging the developmental growth of all children in the classroom is observation. Teachers can practice being more perceptive in observing the capabilities and needs of each child, in setting developmental goals which are realistic, and in structuring educational situations for the optimum development of this potential. The teacher who carries out this approach in the classroom will find that the best in each child will be brought out.

# PART

# 2 PREPARING THE SCHOOL PROGRAM

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## THE SCOPE OF PREPARATION

Before the children arrive in a classroom, there are several steps the teacher can take to prepare for the program. The physical environment of the classroom, the materials and furnishings available for use, and the scheduling of introductory events all need to be inspected, evaluated, and then geared to the particular style of the teacher and to the anticipated needs of the children. Evaluation is an ongoing process, however, and initial decisions should be reconsidered in the light of changes in the children and their needs. Making sound decisions at the start of the program will enable the teacher to adapt more easily to emerging requirements, so that the entire learning experience can be more successful for everyone involved.

## DESIGNING THE PROGRAM

The learning environment of the preschool should be relaxed but geared to success. Equipment, materials, and experiences should be arranged so that the child will want to acquire knowledge and be creative. This GUIDE does not attempt to cover all the learning experiences possible within the preschool program. Rather, it is an attempt to share some techniques which have been used with particular success in evaluating children, the environment, and the classroom materials. There are also suggestions for carrying out initial procedures; teachers can then explore learning situations more in tune with their own personalities and their particular goals for individual children.

Activities should be planned on the basis of the children's developmental levels. All of the children will not be ready for the same activity at the same time, nor will they progress at the same rate. In addition to individual differences in ability, there may be a wide age-range in the preschool, and this will mean even greater differences in capability. The teacher must be familiar with:

- the developmental rate and special needs of each of the children in the class;
- the nature of the environment in which the children live, and how they have learned to cope with it (all teaching should be realistic in terms of the children's previous experience and capabilities);
- the skills necessary to improve their relations within the environment, and the methods for teaching needed skills;
- the means to create a friendly, accepting atmosphere.

EVALUATING THE CHILDREN

Teachers may find it helpful, when attempting to assess a child's developmental level, to refer to the following list of areas of physical, intellectual, and emotional growth.

* Sensory awareness:

Observe the child's use of the senses:

- the sensory stimuli to which the child reacts most readily;
- the habitual manner of exploring materials through sight, sound, and touch;
- the child's reaction to visual and auditory stimuli (sounds involved with lesson materials, expression by the teacher and other children, sounds inside or outside the room);
- hypersensitivity to sound: the kind of sound (music, sudden noises) which interrupts the child's activity;

- perception of size, form, color, and depth, inferred from the child's ability to manipulate small objects (crayons, pegs, puzzles); awareness of distant objects; ease of movement and sense of balance;

- manner of touch (whether soft or firm), use of the hands or other parts of the body, preference for touching certain types of surfaces, as well as accompanying facial and body movements.

✱ Motor coordination:

Observe the way a child uses large muscles:

- his or her ability to walk and run;

- general mobility (getting around the room, spontaneous negotiation of obstacles);

- manner of sitting in a chair;

- manner of climbing, pushing, pulling, throwing, and catching.

Observe the level of skill in large body movements: climbing up and down stairs (stance, gait, and rhythm of movement are important), as well as mastery of the tricycle, swing, etc.

Also observe the child's use of small muscle control:

- whether the child can easily manipulate table-toys (color-cone, nest of blocks, pegs);

- any difficulty with eye-hand coordination;

- whether the child grasps things with the fist or with the thumb and fingers;

- whether he or she is definitely either right- or left-handed.

Finally, observe how a handicapped child compensates for the handicap.

* Use of materials:

Observe the way the child uses materials, and compare this with the other children in the class and with the standards set for children of this age.

* Sustained play:

Note the length of time the child can sustain play with any single material, with and without adult support; note the reasons for distraction from and cessation of the activity.

* Language:

Examine the whole range of the child's language skill, remembering that receptive language comes even before expressive language. Observe the child's response to gesture and non-verbal communication as well as his or her response to speech, both simple and complex.

Observe the child's pre-speech vocalizations: single words, simple combinations of words, simple sentences and questions. Note the use of sounds or words in many situations, the child's initiation of and involvement in conversation, and any abnormalities of speech, such as poor articulation, echolalia, repetition of phrases in a rhythmic pattern, or stuttering.

* Accumulative knowledge:

Observe how a child's knowledge is displayed incidentally through spontaneous comments on objects observed looking around the room or out the window, on pictures and ideas in the book at story time, or on experiences during the music period. The degree of sophistication shown in play, as the child combines materials to simulate something, also indicates the extent of his or her knowledge.

✱ Frustration tolerance:

Observe the child's degree of acceptance (if any) of routines, changes or limitations of activity, inability to master skills, interference with an activity by a parent, teacher, or another child, and failure to change the teacher's behavior.

The child may deal with frustration in one of several ways: (a) passive non-compliance, (b) withdrawal from the situation, (c) activity with other materials, (d) aggressive attacks on other children or adults, (e) destruction of materials, or (f) explosive reactions.

✱ Initiative:

Observe the child's way of approaching and relating to people, and his or her ability to react to minimal cues from the environment, as manifested by the way the child:

- first approaches and responds to people and materials;
- responds in a group;
- attempts to start group-play;
- requests help or gets the teacher's attention;
- explores the room and the materials in it.

✱ Interpersonal Relationships:

The degree of a child's awareness of adults and other children is inferred from the child's facial expression, such as "shutting-out" through self-preoccupation, or becoming absorbed with materials rather than actively participating in activities.

It is important to observe the emotional tone underlying the child's pattern of relationships with people during the class -- whether it is affection, anger, aggression, or fearfulness -- as well as physical expressions of emotion. Of interest, also, is a child's response to other children's facial expressions -- to crying, laughter, temper tantrums, bizarre behavior, and aggression.

* Imagination:

The quality of the child's imagination is seen in dramatic play (simple, or complex; solitary, or in a group) and is also inferred from comments overheard during play with creative materials. It is also important to note the child's ability to differentiate between the real and the imaginary, or between the real and the simulated (for example, a real phone and a play phone).

* Creativity:

The child's approaches to creative activities, the extent of involvement in them, and apparent satisfaction from them, can also be observed, and compared with the initiatives and gestures of other children at this age.

Working with Consultants

A teacher may at times need to call for additional help: this can come from such people as speech therapists, physical therapists, or psychologists. By being continually observant, the teacher will be better able to work productively with the therapist in defining the problem, in deciding if the child should be observed while interacting within the group or working alone, in determining how and when parents should be involved with the program, and in making constructive suggestions.

The teaching staff should not expect magic when the consultant is brought in. Progress takes time and maturation, at the child's own rate. Also, the parents of a child who has difficulties may be communicating their anxieties to the child; the teacher and the consultant should be sensitive to this, look at the realities of the situation, and obtain parental cooperation if possible.

## EVALUATING THE ENVIRONMENT

It has long been recognized that the preschool environment is very important to the success of the preschool program. The environment provides the major stimuli and material for learning, and the setting for developmental activities of many kinds.

### The Three Levels of Function

To help the teacher understand the impact of the environment upon the children and the program, it is useful to remember that the environment functions at three levels: the simple safety and comfort level, the emotional-support level, and the program level.

I The safety and comfort level:

Architects, teachers, and others concerned with designing responsive classroom environments all agree that the classroom should be safe, physically comfortable, and easy to work in. It should be attractive, bright, have an open feeling, and provide a variety of textures and surfaces -- large and small spaces, active and quiet areas. Adjacent activity areas should be separated if the activity taking place in one would be distracting to children in the next, and there should be free and easy access between all areas of a classroom. Walls and flooring should be insulated against the cold and noise, and easy to keep clean. Ceilings should

have bright, overhead lighting. It is desirable for the teacher to be able to manipulate the lighting and temperature of the room to adapt for different activities.

The children's safety must be fully considered. Dangerous conditions such as splintered floors, very high stair railings, unguarded hot water pipes and radiators, accessible electrical outlets, poor heating, inadequate fire escapes, and hazardous windows, stairwells, or machinery are covered in the local Building Codes and must be corrected.

2 The emotionally supportive level:

This level is concerned with the ability of the environment to convey "healing power." In a stimulating, protective, and emotionally warm environment, trust and self-confidence are developed, children reach out to each other, and good things happen. Children of all capabilities prosper in a setting where their emotional, intellectual, physical, and social needs are met. Indeed, every person who comes into contact with this sort of environment receives support from it.

As adults, we have learned to make do with poor environments which do not lend themselves to our comfort or enjoyment, so we must make every effort to see what these environments are really like. A young child coming from a protective and supportive home environment can not learn as well or develop as quickly while coping with a hostile setting.

3 The program level:

The environment can also contribute to specific educational goals: purpose and philosophy must be assessed so that they can be carried out in the physical setting. Teachers can learn how to transform the environment so that it will work to forward their purposes; if they do not, it will undermine their program. Teachers can perceive how

elements of the environment have an impact on how goals are being met. For example, if promoting autonomy and initiative in the children is desirable, does the environment reinforce this philosophy, or does it undermine it?

It follows, then, that it is necessary to make the environment responsive to manipulation. The teacher makes the initial organization of the room, which in turn suggests and supports the manipulation of the room by the children. If children and teacher can work together in the transformation of real space, they are asserting themselves on the environment in a constructive way.

Environmental Elements to Consider

The following concepts relating to this need for constructive manipulation may be helpful to teachers as they begin the process of accommodating the environment to themselves and their pupils:

* Space-time identity:

Helping children know where they are, where they have been, and where they are going is essential. Large graphics with personal symbols -- artwork and photographs -- can represent the day's events. Giant colored symbols can outline an entryway.

* Articulation:

A physical organization should define a room's different activity spaces and functions. Furniture, artwork, floors, and ceilings can delineate space and clarify for the child what happens there. Strong visual cues can communicate relatedness and appropriate activity.

* Transition:

Links between places help in the sometimes painful alternatives between leaving and staying, changing activities and deciding on where to go next. "Decompression places" help a child adjust to arriving at school and satisfy the need for an unhurried entry into the day's events, as well as for greeting rituals.

* Scale:

A child should be able to see that this is a place for children. There should be visual delights at a child's eye level. The classroom should feel like a small-child space that might also accommodate an adult.

* Community vs. Isolation:

These terms describe the organization of settings that either support people getting together or that keep people apart. We can support either community or isolation by the way we arrange chairs, tables, pillows, and lighting. Settings which enable people to get together should be built into the environment. For example, the entry to an area -- a transition place -- can be either a nice place to gather, comfortable and spacious, or a hurry-up-and-move-on setting, with a feeling of cramped or inadequate space. When examined in this way, the experience of waiting can be seen as a learning experience which can take place in a communal setting.

* Privacy:

An opportunity for privacy is essential for good mental health. A variety of visual, acoustical, physical, and psychological options will allow children the private moments they need. A balanced learning environment allows a flow between privacy, small group, and large group settings.

* Territoriality:

A crucial concept in the development of self, territoriality has its roots in animal behavior and is a basic need. Each child must have a personal space where his or her individuality can be respected and expressed. It can be small (although it must be bigger than a shoebox!), but it must be inviolate.

* Character:

Without character, the special quality which expresses uniqueness, joy, and humanness, we have lifeless institutions. Character can be supplied by colors, murals, or sculpture -- something for the fantasy of the child and for the child in the adult.

Changing the Environment

With these concepts in mind, the teacher motivated to modify the environment to better meet the needs of the class can follow this simple sequence of steps:

1 - Evaluate the children developmentally.
2 - Set developmental goals for them.
3 - Assess the classroom and play spaces, the materials, equipment, money, and other resources.
4 - Plan changes which relate both to goals and resources.
5 - Execute these changes.
6 - Re-evaluate the environment after a period of use.
7 - Document each of these steps.

This creative process can be continued indefinitely; with each change and evaluation, the staff can come closer to achieving the most positive environment possible for the children.

## EVALUATING THE MATERIALS

Another factor which deeply influences the success of the preschool program is the classroom materials. Traditionally, budget planning for the fiscal year has not coincided with the opening of the school year; thus, teachers often find it difficult to anticipate the needs of the children who will be in the class when asked to order supplies, equipment, and materials. It is therefore wise to assess materials in terms of their availability and the contribution they make in stimulating the children's overall developmental growth.

One example of the potential of just one material in stimulating developmental awareness on many levels can be found in the simple blocks found in most classrooms. For a young child, block building is highly meaningful, and is approached with enthusiasm and absorption. It provides an opportunity for emotional release, emotional growth, social and self-development, and cognitive learning. For instance:

- Blocks are an excellent first medium: every action with them results in an achievement, a change in the environment, a creation.
- Block manipulation gives a feeling of control; the child has the power to represent and then control symbols of the real, adult world.
- Blocks are an adventure: the children can test themselves against real risks and difficulties, thus building self-assurance and confidence.
- Blocks are an emotional release: they provide a safe channel for self-assertion and the expression of hostility. A child can possess, control, and destroy block structures with relative safety and no irreparable consequences.
- Block play satisfies children's need to exercise jurisdiction over objects: chil-

dren may take possession of an area with a block fence and vehemently defend their domain. When the right to ownership is respected, children become less defensive; they relax, and are able to include other children in their domain.

- Blocks facilitate symbolic expression and fantasy; they have symbolic value apart from (and within) dramatic play. Games or fantasy with blocks allow children to play at mastering events which are in reality beyond their control.

- Block enclosures provide the privacy and protection of a quiet retreat, or create a place where fearful or aggressive children can feel safe.

- Blocks facilitate social interaction and growth: blocks interest and attract other children to join in the play. Block play provides a structure, definite roles, and the security of a pattern so that children can interact more easily, leading or following without fear or resistance.

- Blocks foster the development of cognitive concepts: they provide a multitude of experiences helpful to a successful transition from sensory-motor intelligence to conceptual, operational intelligence. Children learn about symbols when they use a block to represent another object or build block structures to represent objects or places; they learn logical-mathematical relationships by grouping blocks and accessory objects that go together in shape or function, or by ordering blocks by size, quantity, or quality; they learn spatial-temporal relationships by moving things (placing themselves and the objects in various relationships) and observing sequences of events and their causes (building up, then knocking down).

Similar potential for a variety of positive learning experiences may be found in many other materials: an observant teacher will be able to find it.

BEGINNING PROCEDURES

The start of school represents a period in the life of the young child which can be both rewarding and threatening. It is wise, therefore, to work at developing a positive home-school relationship that is meaningful to the entire family. Some suggestions on procedures which may help to establish good home/school relationships are given below.

The Open House

Setting aside a day for Open House prior to the actual opening of school as an official beginning to the school year has many positive effects.

* The parents are able to:
  - meet the teacher in person;
  - see the classroom and teaching materials firsthand;
  - meet other parents from their community who have children the same age and discuss mutual interests and concerns about the new program;
  - see some of the other children in the preschool setting;
  - start out the school year at the same level of basic awareness;
  - appreciate the teacher's position;
  - get some reassurance for their anxieties (for some parents, school will mean confronting separation from their child, perhaps for the first time);
  - learn about the staff's expectations for each child, including the mentally retarded children.
* The teacher is able to:
  - meet the parents for the first time, in a relaxed, comfortable way;

- communicate to them her personal concerns and ideas, and invite them to work cooperatively with the staff in conferences and projects to come;

- assess the parents' concerns and resources realistically, which will aid in assessing their children's needs;

- meet the children for the first time in an informal situation.

✱ The children are able to:

- meet the new adult authority to whom they will be entrusted;

- explore the physical environment of the school, which can perhaps alleviate their anxieties about finding their way around in the first weeks of class.

When setting up the Open House, several parents and children should be invited to be present at the same time. Both parents should be encouraged to come. Some parents may have to bring other children, or may need transportation. Provisions must be made for these contingencies. The group, however, should be kept small.

The atmosphere should be friendly and informal, with the teacher giving attention mainly to the parents. Parents should be at liberty to move freely about the school and to talk to the teacher, in order to become familiar with the classroom, the other parents, the children, and the teacher. While assistants supervise the children in their exploration of the schoolroom, the teacher can answer parents' questions about the school schedule, the room, what kinds of and how many children will be in the class, and how the child feels about going to school.

## The Initial Conference

The aim of this meeting is to establish a trusting relationship among parents, child, and teacher. It is another step toward helping the child and parents to become comfortable with the school situation, and helps them adjust to forthcoming activities. The conference gives the teacher an opportunity to interpret and answer questions about the purposes, philosophy, procedures, and regulations of the preschool program. It should be made clear, however, that the teacher should not discuss behavior or other problems in the presence of the child. An appointment can be made for a future date for this purpose.

At this initial conference, the teacher should have a list of procedures in effect within the school to give to the parents. Such a list will be based on the requirements of the school system, the climate, and the teacher's own program, and will include details regarding accident procedures, sickness notification, appropriate dress for play, and other such regulations.

This initial family conference is essential. Adaptations may be necessary if the preschool enrollment is large, but should not alter its purpose. Other professional people may have to assist the teacher, and some of the conferences, for various reasons, may have to occur in the children's homes. Nevertheless, the teacher should meet all of the parents before or during the first week of school, and there should be some mutual exchange of ideas and concerns about the child and the program.

# PART

# 3 CARRYING OUT THE PROGRAM

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## THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The school program will have a great impact upon the children who attend, as this may be the first time most children are exposed for a long period of time to large groups, to peers, and to a new adult. For young children, the world is a new and exciting place, with many things to explore. The teacher may find this eagerness for learning a mixed blessing, for as children may be receptive to direction from the teacher, they may also find their attention constantly stimulated and distracted, and may want to explore interests of their own. If the teacher has a clear set of objectives, for the class as a whole as well as for individual children, these tangents need not be disruptive. An educational program for young children should focus on the following areas of learning: developing a self-image, developing personal and social skills, refining language and communication skills, fostering motor development, gaining a familiarity with their bodies and their environment through creative arts and movement activities.

## FIRST STEPS TOWARDS COMPETENCE

Personal and social skills are of the utmost importance for the child's development. Areas of development which may be emphasized in the program include:

### Developing a Self-Image

In the development of children's self-image, body image is of great importance. Young children first learn to differentiate themselves from the world, and from the mass of stimuli surrounding them, and then learn to identify themselves by name. Children build a "self-portrait" made up of all that they see as belonging to themselves: first their bodies, and then forms of behavior, character traits, and other characteristics which they have observed in others.

This phase of development is important in all children, but is of particular importance for mentally retarded children, because some of their crucial perceptual and conceptual abilities may be hindered. Therefore, a part of the preschool program must be devoted to teaching them about their bodies, so that the children may develop as whole persons.

The teacher can gain insight into the child's self-concept by careful observation, and should work towards:

- developing further in the children a clear concept of their own bodies and their abilities and limitations;
- developing physical skills through the use of toys and other equipment;
- furthering language skills by teaching the names of parts of the body;
- giving the children an opportunity to try out new skills and to go as far as they are able to in climbing, running, jumping, etc.;
- improving the children's opportunities to relate to others;
- encouraging proper sexual identification: promoting the knowledge, in a natural situation, that girls are girls and grow up to be women, and boys are boys and grow up to be men.

Some teaching methods which have been especially successful in achieving these goals are:

✱ Imitation:

Children learn some things by imitation -- by observing behavior in others which brings attention, approval, and satisfaction -- and by observing what older children, the teacher, and other adults do. Most of what the teacher wishes the child to absorb will have to be demonstrated, to aid in imitation.

✱ Talking:

During the course of the day, the teacher will "just talk" to the children in a natural manner. Some portion of each day should be spent with each individual child, greeting, communicating feelings, and giving approval at appropriate times, in order to build the child's sense of self.

✱ Games and Devices:

- Games that require physical skill;
- Songs that draw attention to, or use, parts of the body;
- Finger plays that use fingers, hands, head, etc.;
- Stories that call attention to use of parts of the body;
- Pictures of people in action;
- Flannel board devices used as games;
- Clothing for specific body parts, or to express daily living roles.

Personal and Social Skills

Self-Care:

The children should have many opportunities to learn and practice skills that promote independence. Areas of emphasis will include washing, toilet training, care of teeth, dressing and undressing, hanging up clothes, use of eating utensils, and safe use of potentially dangerous equipment.

✱ Safety:

There must be rules protecting the child's own safety, as well as the safety of others, and limits must be set. Children should learn not to hit with toys in hand, not to

push or shove, and not to throw blocks or toys. They should carry chairs correctly, put toys away after use, walk up and down stairs without pushing, and show caution when riding wheeled toys. Pedestrian traffic rules should be taught, explained, and observed.

* Courtesy:

Certain areas of good manners can be emphasized, such as greeting visitors nicely, finding spaces for them to sit, and learning and using the names of teachers, children, and visitors. The aim here is to teach the child to be socially competent, to be considerate of others, and to respect all persons. These attitudes and skills make the child and those around him feel more comfortable, thus encouraging positive social contacts, especially between the child and adults. "Courtesy is caught as well as taught."

* Following directions:

The teacher should give a direction once and then give the child an opportunity to carry it out. Simple games involving one direction can be played, in which each child has a turn to hear one instruction and carry it through. The individual child's reaction time should be considered. If it is necessary to practice a firedrill, the importance of complying immediately should be stressed.

* Taking turns:

Sharing comes only after possessing; taking turns happens easily only after the child knows that opportunities are ample. Each individual child should be allowed a turn at an activity, and the wait should be kept as short as possible.

✱ Consideration of others:

The teacher should teach ownership and possession, and respect for others' property. No child should be allowed to disrupt a group. Groupings and regroupings may be made on the basis of interest and tolerance. Kindness and care of animals may be taught by keeping a pet turtle, bird, or fish in the classroom.

✱ Work habits:

Establishing good work habits is an integral part of the whole program, and difficult to separate from it. The children should be taught to do those useful things of which they are capable, to complete a task once they have begun it, to evaluate it and to integrate it into their experience.

Three important ingredients of good work habits are: respect for materials being used, respect for the possessions of others, and respect for the efforts of others.

Children should be taught to take care of equipment, and should put toys back in definite places; each child should have a personal cubby or some other ownership area.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The area of language development and communication is of considerable importance in a preschool program. Children with limited vocabulary must resort to other, less acceptable means of expressing themselves: tugging, pointing, stamping, throwing temper tantrums, crying, or withdrawing. The basic language aims in the preschool are, therefore, to provide the child with:

- the ability to make requests and carry out simple instructions;

- the ability to understand and carry on simple conversations;
- a channel of release for feelings;
- a method for planning and directing the environment;
- a vocabulary appropriate to the child's age, environment, and experience (parts of the body, names of rooms and items of furniture, the clothes that are worn, the food that is eaten, the actions carried out daily, and the sensory experiences encountered).

The teacher will hopefully have a sincere interest in what the children are trying to say, and should listen patiently when they attempt to express themselves. This responsiveness creates an emotional climate conducive to speech development, in which the child feels accepted, respected for his achievements, and secure.

The teacher can clarify feelings for the children. For example, when a child is feeling angry or hurt, the teacher can help to verbalize this frustration. Emotions are important. They must be cared about, talked about, and thought about.

The teacher can also recount actions and events for the children. For example, if the class takes a walk, the teacher can say, "we took a walk." The children will enjoy having their experiences retold.

Toy telephones, costumes, and dolls are all equipment which will encourage language development activities. Large colorful pictures from magazines, photographs, or models can be used for simple identification exercises, or used in sequence to tell a story.

Real images are more successful than stylized images. Pictures and models should be life-like, not confused or "funny" pictures, such as animals dressed up, or cartoons.

Pictures or models of familiar objects, animals, or people can initiate a game of evoking the sounds which they would make. The area of familiar sounds is a good place to begin with "silent" children. "Acting-out games" involving sounds are very good. The children can pretend that they are trees and the wind is blowing through them, saying "oooooooo" while swaying back and forth. Or the children could all be flies, holding out their wings and going "zzzz," or tops spinning "mmmmmmm."

Naming games are also useful. The teacher might put together a box of simple objects and make a game of each child's reaching in, bringing something up, and naming it. Or, each child in turn might be given a simple instruction: "Show me Mary's shoe; show me the tissue box; the light switch. John, show me your hand." After much repetition, over a period of time, the children will learn the names of things and of parts of the body.

Rhymes are a good medium for speech work, as the rhythm is appealing to the child and the rhyme helps in developing auditory discrimination.

Reading to children is an excellent way to train them in language. Books should be chosen for good pictures and text. If a book is too complicated, the teacher should tell the story in terms which the children will understand. Many of the books should relate to the experiences the children have had.

Developing Sensory Discrimination

The rate of children's development in many skills, as well as the development of a self-image, is dependent in part on their sensory perception. As they become more aware of various stimuli, they are better able to differentiate themselves from the environment and can thereby make an attempt to cope with it. The teacher should be aware of the opportunities for sensory experiences in the

classroom and should encourage the use of all the senses, remembering that some children learn better through one sensory modality than others. Lessons can be devised which teach concepts, such as:

* Color matching:

Use 6 balls of yarn (2 each of red, yellow, and blue). As each child matches the red yarn to the red, the teacher says "red." After the children have matched these several times and the teacher has said the words "red," "yellow," "blue" several times, the three balls can be put on the table. The children hide their eyes and the teacher removes one, saying "Who knows what color is missing?" The children can take turns being teacher and taking one of the balls away.

A further step in this would be for the teacher to say "red" and the child to choose the red ball. The goal is for the teacher to pick up the red ball and the child to say "red."

* Shape matching:

Use 4 x 5 cards cut in triangles, circles, squares, oblongs, etc. The child can match a triangle to a triangle, and so forth.

* Rhythm matching:

The teacher does something with rhythm sticks (bang loudly, then softly; bang three times, etc.). The children imitate what was done, using their sticks.

* Sound source matching:

Pictures of several animals (cat, cow, dog) are displayed. The teacher says "mooo" and a child chooses the picture of the animal who makes that sound.

A game can also be made of identifying various unseen objects of different surfaces, textures, and shapes by feeling and touching them. The children can explore the feel of many different materials, media, and elements (silk, mud, fingerpaint, water) and experiment with and talk about how various sorts of stimulation feel (heat and cold, stroking and pinching). At snack time, foods with different textures, flavors, aromas, seasonings, colors, shapes, and noises when being eaten, should be served.

Kinesthetic, auditory, and visual discrimination activities play a vital role in language learning, and add a needed depth to many experiences.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Creative activities are a large part of the curriculum of any preschool -- and with good reason. They fulfill many needs: they provide an excellent outlet for self-expression, teach and provide a leisure time activity, give the child a feeling of accomplishment, and help develop the child's ability to play alone and with others. They provide excellent opportunities for improving coordination of large and small muscles, for sensory stimulation, for language stimulation, for sound and sight discrimination. They are, in short, one of the foundations on which the preschool is built, the means by which many of the ends are met.

Music

There are no limits to the effective uses to which music can be put in the program. Many learning experiences can be made more pleasant through music. For instance, the child can learn the names and sounds of many animals from a song like "Old MacDonald had a Farm." A child may hesitate to try a new activity, but might try if a song goes along with it. Soothing music can calm an excitable, hyperactive child, while stimulating music might make a withdrawn child

respond. Gay music can brighten a rainy, dreary day, and an angry child can express his hostility by banging a drum, or stamping his feet. In bad weather, when the children cannot go outdoors, rhythms and games can help work off excess energy. Music can help children develop better auditory perception and memory -- both vital to speech. Music also helps in the socialization of the child through encouraging participation in group activity.

Art

Because children are often very frustrated by their inability to express themselves through language, and because so much of the world is just too much for them, art becomes one area in which they can readily find an outlet.

Art contributes to the children's developmental growth through the use of different media: perceptual abilities are increased when children learn to distinguish between hard and soft things, bright and dark colors, wet and dry media. Arts and crafts objects also help to develop eye-hand coordination. These activities facilitate the socialization process: a child can work alone or in a group, show work to others, or relate to others while working.

There are some art activities in which the end product itself, not just the learning and expression achieved in the making of it, becomes the goal. In producing a gift for a parent or building a useful item in carpentry, the end product may be the strong motivating factor. The child will also learn useful skills and respect for tools in the process of making something.

Art activities can be designed using the materials available in a classroom, materials brought from home, objects found in the environment, and materials available through Recycle Centers.

Art activities encompass a full range of manipulative and social abilities, and the teacher may plan the day's events to meet the needs of individual children in the classroom.

It is useful to think of art activities as falling into the following categories:

1 Exploratory activities, acquainting the child with touch media

2 Activities acquainting the child with tools

3 Activities with more complicated directions or procedures, or incorporating multiple steps or media

4 Activities emphasizing an end product and planned for increasing attention span.

Any material or medium used in an arts session -- such as molding or modeling with clay or dough, drawing, painting, printing, creating 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional constructions, and working with weaving and stitchery -- incorporates all of the above categories. The medium demands that a child experience it in a number of ways in order to exploit its full potential, and to develop more fully his or her own cognitive skills through using the material.

Creative Movement

Creative movement activities offer children a new way to reach out and communicate, a new way to see and perceive. They can give children:

- sufficient freedom to express themselves in an atmosphere which is accepting and free of constant direction;
- the opportunity to feel an awareness of the whole self through dance or body action;
- self-esteem and an awareness of the physical and emotional self which makes becoming a member of a group possible;

- a resolution of conflict and hostility by channeling it constructively into body action or dance;
- stimulation and sensitization of the senses and of emotional, physical, and intellectual skills;
- better social awareness, ability to make and sustain contact with another person.

Creative movement sessions are simple to plan and satisfying to perform.* The teacher can design a movement activity around the actions and gestures that children bring with them as a part of their personalities: for example, a child who likes to jump may inspire a jumping dance in the rest of the class. Basic locomotor activities can also serve as a basis for new types of creative movement in a group experience. Some examples follow:

✱ Walking:

The teacher can ask the group to "walk around the room without bumping into each other, walk forward, walk backward, walk lightly or heavily, with giant or small steps," etc. The teacher's voice should accent and express each new quality. Once some basic skills are mastered, the teacher can ask the children to improvise a walk, showing the class what new types of walking can be invented. Sometimes a drum, hand-clapping, or other rhythmic instrument can be used to accentuate the beat of a walking gesture; here the teacher should be careful not to change the quality of the child's work, but only to underline or clarify it.

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* Detailed programs on art and movement experiences are presented in some of the other GUIDES in this series: A Guide to Creative Arts and A Guide to Creative Movement, both written directly for teachers of developmentally disabled children.

* Hopping, jumping:

The children may start with one foot, then change to another, and alternate motions as the teacher gives the cue to shift.

* Skipping, running, galloping, etc.

The children can try these movements individually, or in groups, holding hands or with hands by their sides, in fast or slow motion, in a circle or with few restrictions. An emphasis on loose, free movement helps the children release energies held inside during other activities of the day, and allows them to focus in on more detailed or specific ways of moving.

* Improvisation:

Children may be asked to combine different types of movement to create a dance of their own. Individually or in groups, they can invent their dance to the sound of music, to the beat of a drum, to imitate a particular feeling or an object in nature, or to utilize a specific body part. After the children have presented their dances to the rest of the group, there may be a discussion about the gestures the children enjoyed most, or how it felt to move in a certain way.

Creative movement sessions offer a good way of beginning a new activity in a new way. For example, the teacher may have the children dance with their hands, before engaging in a finger-painting exercise, or may use stretching to prepare the class for a more active experience. Some teachers who feel most comfortable with movement have used these sessions to very successfully create moods within their classrooms and a readiness for each event of the day.

## FOSTERING MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Young children need a great deal of physical activity; it is very important to the development of their body image. By learning to use their bodies in different ways, they learn their limitations and their abilities.

### Toys and Equipment

Toys and equipment should be chosen carefully, and should not be intricate things that wind up or have easily broken parts. They should be chosen for durability. The toys will take a "beating" and should be able to withstand it.

Things which are versatile and can be put to many uses are best. They should be as free of detail as possible, so that the child's imagination can determine the equipment's use. A simple truck which can be used for pulling, pushing, riding and dumping is better than one designed for only one activity.

Some equipment should be large and easily manipulated, such as large blocks which can be lifted, moved, stood on. Small toys would frustrate a child whose muscular coordination is not ready for them.

Toys which encourage cooperative play are desirable. A wagon that one child pulls and another rides in, or the housekeeping area where one cooks and another eats, are good examples of this.

### Large Muscle Development

Depending upon the available space, equipment, and resources of the preschool, many motor development activities can be devised:

- a plank can be put on two blocks for the children to walk across;
- blocks can be put near each other so the children can walk from one block to another, first stepping over, then jumping over, a block;

- balls of all sizes -- from basketballs to ping-pong balls -- can be used for throwing, bouncing, rolling, and catching (bean bags can also be used, and later-ring toss). All kinds of games can be devised with balls and bean bags: "See how far you can throw; try to throw the ball into a basket; kick a ball, see how far it will go; see how high you can throw a ball; catch the ball!"

There are also endless possibilities inherent in interpretative play. The children can pretend to be seesaws, birds, airplanes, snakes, or soldiers, can ring bells, go skating, go swimming, whatever.

**Small Muscle Development**

The child's small muscles develop later than the larger ones. Many of the children will have very poor small muscle coordination as a result of their lack of experience and their immaturity. However, there are many activities which can be carried on with these aims in mind:

- To improve eye-hand coordination;
- To learn spatial relationships;
- To strengthen finger-hand coordination;
- To prepare for reading;
- To provide leisure-time diversion.

Also, creative arts activities can be very useful in developing small muscles. Art- and craft-related tasks, such as stringing beads, can be useful and pleasant activities. As the child gains skill in stringing beads, they can be strung by shape, color, or size. Painted spools can also be strung. The child can start with large beads and very heavy thread, and work down to smaller ones.

**Other Materials That Are Useful**

- Peg boards can be useful whether the pegs are put in randomly or in a predetermined pattern.

- Form boards are especially valuable in physical and cognitive development.
- There are many kinds of puzzles. Wooden tray puzzles are best, and should be available at progressively difficult stages.
- Finger plays, blocks, and spring clothespins are very useful for improving finger-hand coordination.

## UTILIZING COMMUNITY HELPERS AS RESOURCES

As the preschool child matures, he or she gains awareness of the world outside the home. An important goal of the preschool program is therefore to aid the child's adjustment to the outside world. Some specific objectives are:

- To teach the roles of various community members;
- To explain that these people have other roles and activities (the fireman is also a father, some mothers have jobs outside the home);
- To broaden the experiences of the children by actual contact with some of these people and places, either by field trips or visiting representatives;
- To enlarge the child's vocabulary to include the names of community workers and words associated with them.

Doll house play, dress-up play, pictures, stories, and discussions about the uniforms, roles, and functions of community people and agencies are all useful here.

It is also highly desirable for the preschool staff to search out services within the community which may be able to provide support when needed. Agency personnel or independent consultants should be called in to contribute specialized knowledge when necessary.

## CONCLUSION

Mentally retarded children can learn, develop, and grow, in a carefully planned educational program that recognizes the uniqueness and importance of every individual. In many ways, the integration that will take place in classrooms throughout the Commonwealth will benefit everyone concerned, as teachers prepare themselves to be more attentive to their own skills and the skills and special needs of the children in the classroom. A teacher who is most prepared for this challenge will be most rewarded by the program. And a teacher who trusts in the creative potential of each child and resource available will find that the work of designing a creative and responsive program becomes simpler and more enjoyable by the day, that learning is a natural product of a supportive environment, and that the children all benefit from the contact with and the examples set by their classmates.